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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page
Advertising God.—The Editor	145
How the Clergy Ban Books.—Mimnermus	146
A Pseudo-Priestless Speaks.—Ignotus	147
Freethought in Fiction.—Alan Handsacre	148
Criticism and the Bible.—W. Craik	154
More Light on Prophecy.—H. Cutner	155
Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.	

Views and Opinions.

Advertising God.

ALWAYS in the front rank when something inherently stupid is required, the *Morning Post* for February 25 gives a couple of columns on one of the best pages of that issue to a rubbishy sort of a book published by the Christian Evidence Society. The book professes to give the views on religion of over two hundred Fellows of the Royal Society. I haven't read the book and don't intend to waste time—or 12s. 6d.—by doing so. I am, I hope, always ready to listen with respectful attention to either eminent scientists or our local dustmen when they are talking about the things in which they specialize, and about which they may rightly claim to know more than I do. But when they are speaking where their knowledge is equal, and that knowledge is equal to zero, their authority disappears altogether. Then we are not dealing with a statement of scientific fact or scientific theory, but a mere statement of a mental attitude, and their confessions are of value only to the student of the ebb and flow of mass opinion or the prevalence of psycho-pathological states. A genuinely scientific enquiry, or even a genuinely intelligent enquiry, intended to be of use to the student of social psychology would take the replies in cases such as those tabulated, and read them in the light of a knowledge of the early training and educational and social environment of those questioned. But that, of course, is not the aim of the enquiry; and if it were it would not be of the least interest to the really unintelligent public for which the *Morning Post* mainly caters. The object of the book is to provide a kind of soothing syrup for those who might develop an uneasiness with regard to religious beliefs. If they are troubled with doubts about the truth or the utility of religion they are asked to consider the number of eminent men who still believe in a God or a future life, and then to doze again. It is never likely to dawn upon this class that the truth of an opinion can never be settled by a vote, or that there has never yet

been an opinion that had not at one time a very enormous and educated majority against it. Even such Christians as are subject to spasms of intelligent thinking might reflect that at one time Christianity was in an apparently hopeless minority, and also that if a vote had been taken in the sixteenth century it would have swept Protestantism off the face of the earth. In the financial world titles and the names of those enjoying social distinctions are valuable assets on the directorates of bubble companies. In religion the names of eminent men are equally valuable as the equivalents of financial "guinea pigs." In all directions great names are used by knaves to impose upon fools.

* * *

Trying it Both Ways.

When it has been said by Freethinkers that science was opposed to religion, and gave no evidence whatever for the existence of a God or a soul, the reply was to ask whether one expected to find the soul in a test tube, or God in a chemical formula? That reply was considered impressive by most of the champions of theology. To-day men like Jeans and Eddington, with many lesser lights, try to make it clear—by making the water just a little muddier than it was—that science cannot express an opinion on God because the realm of religion is one to which scientific tests do not apply. But if you cannot find God in a test tube, and if the sphere of religion lies outside science, what is the use of quoting scientists, as scientists, on behalf of the reality of God and the soul? Of course, no sensible person ever thought you could find an idea imbedded in a test tube, and it is not a bad sample of the religious type of mind that such an assumption should have been attributed to the unbeliever. On the other hand, it is emphatically not true that the sphere of religion lies outside science or that it is beyond the reach of scientific method. Whether we regard religion as being purely psychological or socio-psychological it still falls within the scope of science. In any case you cannot reasonably throw out the search of a test tube for God as irrelevant, and then take the testimony of a worker with test tubes as decisive, or rule religion as being outside science and then cite science as evidence for the existence of a soul. There should be a trace of consistency even with religious stupidity.

But one striking thing about these figures, selected for the most part, I have not the slightest doubt, from a fairly "safe" list of possibles, is the strikingly large show of declarations against religion, and in this country where public men are generally afraid to express their disbelief this is noteworthy. Thus a question is asked, "Do you credit the existence of a spiritual domain." Of course, "spiritual domain" may mean anything from the world of imponderable

forces with which science juggles, to the ghostland of the spook-hunting spiritualist, but to even this question, out of the 200 answers, no less than 58 are either doubtful or negative. Whether science *rejects* (not whether it supports) the belief in a personal God 103 answer it does not, while 97 answer no or are doubtful. Whether the belief in evolution is compatible with belief in a Creator 121 say it is, while 79 are doubtful or say, no. And what is meant in each case by "Creator" is not stated. The authors of the book are too artful to enquire. Finally, to the question whether late developments of science are favourable to religion 126 say either it is not or they are very doubtful about it. Even on a vote it looks as though religion is rapidly losing ground.

* * *

A Suggestion.

The Churches have a great many methods of conducting the advertising side of their business. First, they write their own testimonials and quote them as quite conclusive evidence. It is hardly ever noted that the testimonies to the super-excellence of Christianity are nearly always written by Christians, mostly by parsons, and they are as convincing, to anyone with moderate intelligence, as the praises that a commercial traveller sings of his goods. Then the Churches supply reports of their excellent work to newspaper men, and afterwards reprint them as unbiased and unasked for testimonies to their work. This plan was worked very assiduously by the Salvation Army, one of their active publicity agents being the late Harold Begbie. Nearly all the newspaper reports of the Churches and Chapels that appear in the papers as though they were independent accounts owe their origin to these pious publicity committees. They are as unsolicited as are the photographs of cabinet ministers stroking their favourite cat in the back garden. But this testimony of scientists to religion might be better worked. I suggest they should be prepared in this way:—

Professor — writes: "I cannot say how much my work on the nature of cancer has been helped by my belief in the purposeful nature of living matter. It seems to me that a disease such as cancer, so difficult to diagnose, and, once established so difficult to cure, points to the persistent efforts of an intelligent power ever on the watch to overcome the puny efforts of man to frustrate the purpose of an Almighty power."

The celebrated alienist, Dr. —, gives it as his considered opinion: "Nothing has so impressed me with a belief in the incurable religious nature of man than the fact that in not a single case of lunacy have I discovered the instinct of religion absent. I have seen men who in their sad state have become a danger to all that were once nearest and dearest to them, who have doubted the most obvious of facts, and have seemed deaf to the plainest dictates of common sense. But never do they show themselves oblivious to the existence of a God. Even idiots never seem to lack this faith."

The Astronomer Royal says: "My years of research into the depths of stellar space, and my detailed survey of stellar and planetary bodies, have convinced me that they bear none of the usual marks which can be attributed to any intelligence known to us, or even conceivable by us. I am therefore compelled to believe in a supreme intelligence as the cause of all we see."

Professor — the eminent biologist, says: "As the most famous biologist in England I may truthfully say that in no part of my work have I ever come

across a form of living matter that was not the product of pre-existing conditions. I am also quite convinced that every bio-chemist of standing in the country is convinced that the secret of the production of living matter is to be found in the field that is their peculiar province. It is this that makes me convinced that there is a Power of which we know nothing, and of the nature of which we have no conception, which is the source of all forms of life."

Psychology provides the same testimony. Thus a Professor of applied psychology in one of our leading Universities writes: "Psychology is rapidly assuming the form of an exact science, and the methods by which this advance has been made is the method that is common to all the sciences. It is true also that the psychologists of every school pursue their studies without the least reference to the 'soul,' and the further the methods of science carries us, the more psychologists dispense with its existence, and the more difficult it is to find some known function for it to perform. It is these facts which supply to me the unshakable conviction that it is in the existence of a 'soul' that we find the line of demarcation between man and the animal world."

I am certain that if the *Morning Post* will publish these opinions, its readers will find them as intelligent and as comforting as anything it has yet issued on the relations between science and religion. We give it full permission to re-publish without the least acknowledgment.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

How the Clergy Ban Books.

"Milling mallecho, this means mischief."

Shakespeare.

"Hebrew mythology contains things which are both insulting and injurious."—J. A. Froude.

"The 'Zolaism' of the Christian Bible is far more pernicious than the 'Zolaism' of fiction."—G. W. Foote.

THE clergy, of whom there are forty thousand in this country, are past masters at stifling or circumventing any movement likely to prove in any way dangerous to their sorry profession. The original Sunday-schools were initiated by ordinary lay-citizens with the sole idea of imparting real education on the one solitary day in the week on which, in the dark days prior to the passing of the Factory Acts, children were free to receive it. Nowadays, Sunday-schools are not concerned with other than the abracadabra of superstition, and the average Sunday-school teacher is no more concerned with real education than a pigeon is for Offenbach's music.

Similarly, the clergy circumvented the Public Library movement, which was primarily intended to place knowledge within reach of everybody. They have, with the help of their catspaws, wielded enormous influence on the local committees of the public libraries, and their one steady aim through the years has always been to render such institutions, from their point of view, entirely innocuous. So long as the shelves of these libraries were stocked with the books of Messrs. Edgar Wallace, Phillips Oppenheim, and other purveyors of sensational pap for intellectual infants, they were content. The very moment any serious attempt was made to place before the ordinary reading public works which made for sanity or ordered thought, they at once displayed their hostility. The boycott was introduced, and the modern index expurgatorius contains the name of practically every author who is worth reading from the days of George Meredith to those of Bernard Shaw. Even popular novelists did not escape this clerical net, and

Hall Caine's *White Prophet* was boycotted in the company of Wells' *Ann Veronica*.

Some time since a number of priestly members of the Conference of Headmasters issued a warning to the parents of schoolboys, in which they called attention to the danger of books, magazines, and plays, which challenged convention. "We venture to do so," said these priestly headmasters, "because we have special opportunities of observing the actual effect upon boys and young men of suggestions so conveyed, to which we feel bound to bear witness." And they added, in the true spirit of the Roman Catholic priesthood, "too little care is exercised to exclude them from the lives of the young."

To read such allusion to the books, magazines, and plays of the day, as if so many of them were a pestilential danger to society, is not pleasant. When such insults come from priestly headmasters and their satellites, who thrust the open Bible into the hands of innocent childhood, one's sense of justice is outraged. For there are so many things in this particular sacred volume which are calculated to bring the blush of modesty to any face except that of a priest. Clergymen mouth more glibly than mummings, and attach loose meanings to the words they fling about so recklessly, but how such men can read the account of Ezekiel's banquet, the story of Onan, or the adventures of the patriarch, Lot, without the slightest remark, and point the finger of admonition at modern writers is inexplicable, except on the hypothesis that they are insincere, and using any means to gain their sorry ends.

If the novels, plays, and magazines of the present day are likely to corrupt the morals of the rising generation, what, in the name of common sense, is the Christian Bible calculated to do? In its pages may be found plain, unvarnished accounts of rape, adultery, and unmentionable vice. The florid, heated rhetoric of the Old Testament leaves little to the imagination, and the least lettered reader can appreciate the glowing periods and sensual sentences. East is East, and West is West, even in literature, and Oriental nastiness frequently begins where Occidental pornography leaves off.

The overt action of the clerical headmasters was simply a trade trick to authorize the use of the boycott, a favourite weapon with priests of all creeds the world over. I have myself seen book orders from libraries, such as: "Wells' novels, except *Ann Veronica*; Swinburne's poems, "Selections" only. And one smart clergyman used to obtain expensive theological books for use in preparing his sermons by the simple expedient of instructing his catspaws on the library committee to add them to the order-list.

The concern of the clergy for safeguarding the reading of the young is simply a ruse to keep their flocks in innocence, and to render them as clay in their hands. If they were really sincere in the matter, they would realize that if an ordinary novel or magazine article will corrupt a young reader, their own sacred book would corrupt a regiment. No novelist, no writer, no playwright, would dare to fill his pages with detailed accounts of incest, rape, and unnatural vice. Yet the clergy force the Christian Bible, which they know full well contains all these terrible things, and more, into the hands of almost every child in the country. Bowdlerizing books is repugnant to every lover of literature, but if ever there were any occasion for such drastic treatment it certainly should be directed against the coarseness of the Christian Bible. Unfortunately, if all the objectionable passages were deleted, this fetish-book would be so reduced as to be almost unrecognisable.

Instead of prating, hypocritically, of indecent and undesirable literature, let the clergy, for once, set

an example. Let them cease to force into the innocent hands of millions of little children a book which they dare no longer read aloud in its completeness to a mixed audience of adults. Until they consent to do this they merit the title of "chartered libertines." The clergy may well smile at one another at their success in stifling knowledge in this country; but how much longer this ridiculous state of affairs is going to last is quite another matter. It is not a matter for the clergy and their satellites, but a question to be settled by the citizens of a country reputed to be civilized.

MIMNERMUS.

A Pseudo Priestess Speaks.

MISS MAUDE ROYDEN, C.H., D.D., is an outstanding example of those well-meaning well-to-do members of the self-confident bourgeoisie, who in their reforming efforts are always trying the hopelessly futile feat of reconciling things that are for ever essentially irreconcilable. She and others like her follow such a course because of a pathetically superficial and inadequate knowledge of the real life of the ordinary man or woman. Necessarily they land themselves in bogs of speculation and self-contradiction.

Miss Royden, consciously or unconsciously, takes the line adopted by R. J. Campbell, who when Robert Blatchford was exposing the falsities of Christianity and magnanimously opened the columns of the *Clarion* to his Christian opponents, declared that Mr. Blatchford was a Christian without knowing it. Mr. Foote very properly nailed this declaration to the counter as an impertinence and an insult, pointing out that it denied Mr. Blatchford's capacity or, what was worse, his good faith. Of course, some time ago to be called a Christian was regarded as a compliment by a much larger number of people than it is so regarded to-day. As time goes on the fact of a person being a Christian does not necessarily carry with it the guarantee that his word is as good as his bond, or that he is more reliable than any member of the community who refuses to subscribe to the Christian creed.

Is Miss Royden a Christian? We do not know. If she has any creed it is sufficiently comprehensive to allow of her believing God to be whatever she chooses. Apparently she approximates to the religion of the Jews and the Unitarians. But she declines to be moved to any particular denomination. One day she can speak at a gathering of people of varying religious creeds and of no religious creed at all! Another day she can preach in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, the citadel of Scottish Presbyterianism! Anything will do for her so long as a belief in God is professed. And the furthest she will go in defining God is that he, she or it is the "purpose" or "mind" behind life. Incidentally when is somebody going to clear up the difficulty about the *sex* of God? Is God masculine or feminine or neuter or what? Anyway, so far, most believers in God regard that person as being of the masculine gender.

Necessarily when we get outside nature we are in a realm of fancy as distinguished from solid fact. Mentally besotted, benighted and neurotic human beings are easily induced to believe in ghosts, bogeys, spooks, sprites, gods, devils, fairies and fiends all belonging to an outside or extra-natural world. And of course anything or any being outside nature (or extra-natural) is unnatural. The unnatural is always inhuman or non-human—what is popularly known in religious circles as "spiritual"—and which Free-thinkers label as superstitious.

Miss Royden has contributed an admonitory article to *Answers*, in which she argues for the

necessity of not forgetting God on the ground that if we do forget him we become the victims of hopelessness; that purpose disappears from our lives, and that we can only find it worth while to struggle for improvement "if we are working alongside of a mighty intelligence in co-operation with a great power."

Now there is nothing very original in that argument. The Freethinker is quite familiar with it and with the threadbare ideas of several Divine Co-operative Societies, which disdain instruction from history, experience and common sense and base their activities upon beliefs in, and worship of, deities of whose existence there is no proof. We are told that if we renounce belief in God we in the long run "give up." But the testimony of history clearly confutes that. As man releases himself from bonds of extra-naturalism he gradually becomes more humane, better informed, wiser, more capable and efficient. Yes, he sees further in retrospect and prospect. To renounce belief in God is not to "give up" but to "get up."

Miss Royden asks us to believe that unbelief drives people "when life's problems become too difficult" to put their heads into gas ovens. That is a familiar argument also ancient and crude. In former days unbelievers used to be struck down dead by the Deity when they stated their atheistic views. Now they save God the trouble and make away with themselves. But does Miss Royden and her fellow theists read the newspapers or do they not? Do they never read the letters left by suicides? A hundred per cent of these effusions show that the writers of them are convinced believers in God; and they often express the hope or wish that God will forgive them for the step they are about to take. There are varying ideas about suicide. But it is pre-eminently a religious crime. Most of us it is to be supposed hold that the vast majority of suicides are mentally deranged persons. If they are not, and have any friends or relatives, they are committing an act, if not of cowardice, of cruelty towards such friends or relatives. Religious mania has without doubt been responsible for very many cases of suicide and mad houses are plentifully stocked with religious maniacs. Hell, the hangman's whip, terrorized many. It still terrorizes some. And would not Miss Royden and her friends be more usefully employed in exposing the real character of God to these? As fear departs from human minds religion languishes. For religion, otherwise a belief in, worship of and obedience to extra-natural beings can only endure so long as fear endures.

Whatever may be said, there is little comfort in Miss Royden's article for the Trinitarians. There is nothing about the triune God. The Son and the Holy Ghost get short shrift. Evidently Miss Royden has no place or use for either or both of them. Of course by this attitude she leaves her readers in vagueness, indefiniteness and uncertainty as to what she thinks of orthodox Christians. It is difficult to see what she is driving at when she cites the missionary and his turnip watch that ticked seven seconds as seven million souls were ticked off to hell. She is probably having a slap at the fundamentalists. But the story of "Paley's watch" would have fitted her theory better because as behind the watch Paley saw its "maker" so behind nature Miss Royden sees its "maker" or "mind" or "purpose," which is Miss Royden's God.

When one reflects dispassionately it is depressing to know that there should as yet be so many human intelligences which it is possible to satisfy with such patent crudities in the way of argument. And with all due respect, Miss Royden uses a great deal of irrelevant padding. What is her "purpose" in such

a rolling sentence as this? "It therefore appeals to us very much to hear of great natural laws with which we can co-operate to serve great evolutionary ends." It can only impress poorly educated and credulous minds. How does it furnish a basis for such a conclusion as this: "If there is a purpose behind life there must be a mind, and that mind is God?" Which God; where is his abode; what are his attributes? If there is a purpose or mind, which is God, behind nature; then he or she or it is very much further behind nature than he, she or it was fifty years since.

IGNOTUS.

Freethought in Fiction. II.

THOMAS HARDY (I.)

THERE are many writers, and some great ones, whose reputations have suffered from the excessive zeal with which their birth-places or dwelling-places have claimed them for their own. The "poor traditionary fame," which has been said to be all that falls to actors, and even more, mere local celebrity—like that of the Mayor of a seaside town who would be forgotten but for some seats placed on the front at his expense, and bearing upon an iron plate his name and the text "the sea is his and he made it"—are not much to be preferred above that perverted provincial patriotism which mistakes accident for inspiration. The prejudices, not only of neighbourhood, but of time and country, count for little in real works of genius; indeed it is because they are concerned with those elements in nature and those ideas and emotions in men that are fundamental and universal that the outstanding figures of literary and all other history retain their hold on the minds and memories of ages. To say that Thomas Hardy was a Dorset man; to tie a label upon him with the titles of the novels and *Wessex Tales* inscribed upon it, and to confine his work to a small geographical area is to miss the essential ingredients of his philosophy, of his supreme mastery of proportion, and of that combination of great idea and meticulous detail which gives him his unrivalled place in English letters.

Thomas Hardy saw out the first generation of this century. The bulk of his work was done before then. From some of his later prose it has been assumed that he may have weakened towards the end in that noble materialism which marks most of his writings. As Lionel Johnson says in his erudite study, Hardy saw that "men still go forth to their work and to their labour, until the evening," and meditated "upon the slow, sure end of all those evenings in the darkness and pain of death." Lionel Johnson, however, was a Catholic, and consequently, as his book shows, thought Hardy lacked the indispensable quality of faith. Burial in Westminster Abbey—there were two other funeral services at the same time, one at Dorchester, attended by the Mayor and Corporation, and one at Stinsford Church (where his heart is preserved), and all the ceremony and pomp of fame which marked Hardy's obsequies may well have created a contemporary impression that he died in the faith as well as in the circumstances of respectability. But if there is much of church architecture and observance in his works they also contain much sadonic and irreverent description of "sacred" things, and some of his many humorous scenes are set in pious surroundings. If he had a sharp eye for the natural frailties of our kind and for the jokes which nature plays with us, it was also his conviction, to use his own words, that "the best tragedy, highest tragedy, is that of the worthy encompassed by the inevitable." In the very article in which he came in for criticism from puritans—chiefly in regard to those stories of Tess and Jude—he proved the fatuity of that criticism, and that what the puritan always forgets is that the "delicacy or indelicacy of a writer is according to his object." Of this truth it is worth giving his own illustration. "If I say to a lady, 'I met a naked woman,' it is indelicate. But if I go on to say 'I found she was

mad with sorrow,' it ceases to be indelicate." Judged by this standard no true artist is ever "indelicate."

Faithfulness to nature, including human nature, and the vision with which he saw, and the matchless style in which he depicted, at once the limits and the possibilities of human life, combine to cement Hardy's prose. It has a certain architectural quality, not Gothic (the study of which was his first employment) but the simpler perfections of Greece and Rome. Such descriptions as those of "the mummied-heath-bells of the past summer" in the *Return of the Native*, or of the personality of Stephen Smith in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* are good examples, while, on the grander scale, the picture of Egdon Heath in the former book, with its magnificent climax shows this craftsman of letters at his highest and so do the studies of his best known characters *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude of the Obscure*. Three brief illustrative passages may suitably follow here. (1) Egdon Heath. "The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim. Who can say of a particular sea that it is old? Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in an hour. The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained." (2) *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. "Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience . . . Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. As she walked along to-day for all her bouncing handsome womliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling in her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then. Yet few knew, and fewer still considered this." (3) *Jude the Obscure*. "Jude's dreams were as gigantic as his surroundings were small. Through the solid barrier of cold cretaceous upland to the northward he was always beholding a gorgeous city—the fancied place he had likened to the new Jerusalem though there was perhaps more of the painter's imagination and less of the diamond merchant's in his dreams thereof than in those of the Apocalyptic writer." Observe the last part of this—Hardy knew his Bible, the clergy, the methodists, the preachers, the churchwardens, the deacons, the bell-ringers and the sextons, and has treated them all as they are—human nature which, as he finds it, and as indeed it is, is not much affected by supernatural grace. Take for example the incident of the Parish Choir at Longpuddle (in *Life's Little Ironies*), when, finding the gallery cold, Nicholas Puddingcome, the choir leader, laid in "a gallon of hot brandy and beer ready mixed," and took it to church with him in the afternoon. "By keeping the jar well wrapped up in Timothy Thomas's bass-viol bay it kept drinkably warm" till they wanted it, which was "just a thumbleful at the Absolution, and ginning of the sermon." The choir, thus refreshed, went to sleep, and when suddenly awakened by being nudged on the announcement of the closing hymn, Nicholas (who thought he was still at a jolly party of the night before) got busy with his fiddle at "The Devil Among the Tailors"—and that was the end of the players who were replaced by "a barrel organ" with "a really respectable man to turn the winch."

Before passing to a second article, in which we shall give some biographical facts and a brief study of Hardy as a poet, we present another scene that may well be pleasing to readers of this journal. It is from *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Mr. Swancourt is inspecting the new roofing in the chancel of the church which, with the assistance of William Worm, a labourer, he has installed.

"We worked like slaves, didn't we, Worm?" "Ay sure we did; harder than some here and there—hee, hee. Like slaves I believe—hee hee! And won't ye foaming mad, sir, when the nails wouldn't go straight? Mighty I! There, 'tisn't so bad to cuss and keep it in as to cuss and let it out, is it, sir?" "Well, why?" "Because you, sir, when you were a putting on the roof, only used to cuss in your mind, which is, I suppose, no harm at all." "I don't think you know what goes on in my mind Worm." "Oh, doan't I, sir—hee hee! Maybe I'm but a poor wambling thing, sir, and can't read much; but I can spell as well as some here and there. Doan't ye mind, sir, that blusterous night when

ye asked me to hold the candle to ye in yer workshop, when you were making a new chair for the chancel?" "Yes, what of that?" "I stood with the candle, and you said you liked company, if 'twas only a dog or cat—meaning me; and the chair wouldn't do nohow!" "Ah! I remember." "No: the chair wouldn't do nohow. A was very well to look at, but Lord—" "Worm, how often have I corrected you for irreverent speaking?"—"A was very well to look at, but you couldn't sit in the chair nohow. T'was all a-twist wi' the chair, like the letter Z directly you sat down upon the chair. "Get up Worm," says you, when you seed the chair go all a-sway with me. Up you took the chair, and flung 'er like fire and brimstone to t'other end of your shop—all in a passion. "Damn the chair," says I, "Just what I was thinking, says you Sir. I could see it in your face, sir," says I, "and I hope you and God will forgi'e me for saying what you wouldn't. To save your life you couldn't help laughing, sir, at a poor wambler reading your thoughts so plain. Ay, I'm as wise as one here and there."

We close this article with some lines from Lionel Johnson's book above mentioned on Hardy's style. "Here is work, done after the best English manner, and its truth to nature, its truth to art are universal. In the largeness of design, in the march and sweep of imagination, in the greatness of his greater themes, he has given to the novel a simple grandeur and impressiveness, the more impressive for his preoccupation with the concerns of modern thought."

ALAN HANDSACRE.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

The Rev. "Dick" Shepherd, Miss Maude Roydon, and Dr. A. H. Gray, three Christian leaders in this country, have written to the League of Nations declaring that with regard to the war in the East their religion teaches them war is wrong. It is just possible the Japanese may remark that it is a pity this discovery was not made when England was at war, instead of saving this expression of religious virtue until some other country was fighting. And we venture to suggest that if they believe war to be wrong, then preparations for war are wrong, and these three gallant Christians might resolve to take no part in gatherings where the army receives glorification, to denounce those Christian clergymen who bless guns and battleships and act as chaplains in the army and navy. It is not so difficult to find that war is wrong—in Japan, or to protest against militarism—in other countries.

The gallant three offer to join an army of unarmed persons who will place themselves between the Japanese and the Chinese armies with a kind of "Only-over-our-dead-bodies" gesture. We feel they are quite safe, and the insurance companies will not count them as special risks on account of their offer. But we note that the three do not say anything about provision being made for a talking film of the three standing between the two armies—between lunch and dinner—or for a distribution of portraits among the newspapers of the world, with the percentage of profits expected by the adventurers. Probably these things will all be settled before the three leave England for the performance. Meanwhile, not to be behind in this matter, we beg to say that the *Freethinker* will, provided the number of the volunteer parsons reach 100,000, pay the whole cost of the expedition to China and back, with a pension of not less than £5,000 a year to the dependents of any who meet their death in this truly Christian endeavour.

The Film Censor's list of grounds on which films had been banned or cut was headed by "Blasphemy." It would be interesting to know which film or films were banned or cut on that ground. Unless, as there is some reason to fear, Mr. Shortt has changed his mind, he

should be very slow to take this action, and very liberal in his view as to what, if anything, could justify it. On February 26, 1912, when Mr. Shortt had not attained either office in politics, nor a semi-official post in business such as he now holds, Mr. J. Bartram, a constituent of his in Newcastle, and, incidentally then Hon. Secretary of the Newcastle Branch of the N.S.S., wrote to him asking his attitude towards the blasphemy laws. Mr. Shortt's reply (printed in the *Freethinker* of December 25, 1912) was as follows:—

House of Commons,
26/2/1912.

Dear Mr. Bartram,

I quite agree with you that teachers of Secularism are quite as much entitled to freedom of speech as any other members of the community. I am personally entirely opposed to your opinions and teachings, but I should think very little of my case if I found it required the help of the criminal law to maintain it. I cannot see why the decencies of public religious discussion should not be sufficiently safeguarded by healthy public opinion as are the decencies of political discussion. I am opposed to all laws which attempt to stifle free speech or discussion, whether emanating from priestcraft or any other source. I think the sooner the Blasphemy Laws are abolished the better, and I am obliged for the loan of the pamphlet which I return. I remember seeing it some years ago. You may rely on my help if any attempt is made to repeal the laws.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) EDWARD SHORTT.

Mr Shortt, however, was Home Secretary at the time of the Gott case (1920-1) and, as he did not on that occasion put these liberal professions into action, it may be that he is not so sure of their implications in his present position. It is a pity that the films concerned were not indicated, for then we should be in a better position to judge whether what is described as "blasphemy" was merely something which might not have met with approval at Fulham Palace or the Memorial Hall, or something which could have been objected to on grounds that are permissible. At this time of day Mr. Shortt has no right to apply to the pictures an antiquated ban that nobody would dare to suggest applying to plays, books or newspapers.

Attention is called in the religious, and sometimes—when the culprit is caught—in the secular press to the frequency of thefts from churches. It seems that the Parish Church of Mossley Hill, Liverpool, has been robbed five times during the incumbency of the present vicar. We do not know, and dare not suggest, what the *Church Times* intends to imply by the last particular. We note, however, that it recommends the formation of a Watchers Guild, "which, if it does not prevent a robbery, will at least give an opportunity to many for a quiet hour apart from the distractions of the world outside." It would not apparently occur to the Watchers' to spend this quiet hour in church if they were not wanted to guard the till. And what is the Lord doing who is supposed not to allow two sparrows sold for one farthing to fall to the ground without him that he cannot look after the three-penny pieces in offertory boxes? One other question is at least as relevant as the two sparrows. What is the use of praying for protection for your property if the Lord doesn't provide it even for his friends?

We see there is a suggestion that there shall be another day of prayer in favour of world peace. We do hope that the suggestion is not carried out. It will be remembered that early in December the Archbishops of Canterbury and York arranged for a day of prayer for peace—and soon after the Japanese and the Chinese started exchanging Christian compliments of the season. We do not say the Lord pays no attention to prayers. Perhaps he does; but he does seem to go ramping mad and to let things go. Whenever he is prayed to for rain, as often as not he half drowns a district by way of reply. He is perhaps as annoyed at being roused as is a good Christian parent who on a Sunday afternoon is wakened out of his sleep by his children romping in from Sunday school. It really seems dangerous to call the Lord's attention to anything. Better leave him alone.

Just look at what the Lord does when he interferes! First of all he interfered with nature and made man. And instead of making him an incurable idiot so that he would have spent the rest of his existence in praising the Lord, he gave him just that amount of curiosity and independence that would get him into trouble, and so he got kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Then instead of letting man alone, he got mad because man was not better than he made him. He started a Flood only to find that those who survived were worse than those who were drowned. Next he came to earth and got crucified, and that started the disaster of the Christian Church. He wrote a big book, and that has kept people quarrelling ever since it was published. He founded the Catholic Church, and then started other churches in opposition. Perhaps that was to keep men lively. Then a series of other disasters followed. He won the war for the Allies and that nearly ruined the world. And there is on record a long list of people from David to James Douglas, whom he saved from destruction. He never performs a miracle for the benefit of man without being called on to perform half a dozen other miracles to save us from its consequences. Disaster seems written over all his works. And now they are again asking God to interfere! For God's sake keep the Lord out of it. Give man some little chance of doing things in the right way.

The *Universe*, despite the mightiness of its title, is constantly presenting Roman Catholicism in the undignified character of the tailors of Tooley Street, whose wisdom, it will be remembered was in inverse proportion to their numbers, which, like the persons of the Trinity, were three. The latest example of this characteristic in our pious contemporary is an article by Mr. Douglas Newton, entitled "Bad Citizens: A Story with a Moral for Spain," as if the *Universe* circulated in that country! The moral, of course, is for England from Spain, and it is that the Jesuits are "the pioneers of civilization," and if a country expels them it suffers for it. That ubiquitous organization, says Mr. Douglas Newton, was "busy spreading civilization through what is now the United States, while the Progressives of their day were merely hunting wealth."

That the Jesuits and progressives, properly so-called, are and must be in conflict is true enough, but we should like to ask the *Universe* this question. When a good many years ago Dr. Horton delivered a series of lectures entitled "Romanism and National Decay," and used the argument now used in favour of the Jesuits, viz., that the material prosperity of a country is determined by its religion, did not the Catholic Press denounce that contention as absurd and unjust? We do not unreservedly accept this doctrine ourselves, but what is sauce for the Protestant goose should be sauce for the Jesuit gander.

The wise and humane comments and advice given recently by Mr. Justice McCardie on Birth Control, Abortion and Sterilization have been, as could be expected, bitterly received by Catholics. Almost every paper in the kingdom reproduced his lordship's speeches, gave them wonderful publicity, and it is not surprising, therefore, that the matter has been raised in Parliament. Two very indignant Roman Catholic M.P.'s—both Labour men, it may be noted—gave the outspoken judge a piece of their mind. "Men who are learned in law should not insult the intelligence of masses of the people by giving utterance on the Bench to things with which they are not concerned in the administration of justice," was one of the pompous pieces of balderdash and the other member gave vent to his private feelings in much the same way. What a happy state for Free thought there would be if our destinies were controlled by these priest-ridden minds.

The Rev. "Tubby" Clayton is reported to have said: "I would arraign the pulpit under our present fashion as an unsuspected enemy of Christianity. It is a Pandora's box, well stocked with hidden evils." Not so unsuspected, nor so hidden, my dear Tubby—except to such as you!

The truth about missionary efforts does not often leak out, but the *Church Times* is very frank about the failure of Christian education in India. The missionary colleges were founded to convert "educated" Indians and Lord Irwin and the Master of Balliol both have been deploring the lack of success in this direction. What makes matters worse is that whatever converts have been made "do not belong to the educated classes." What an admission! But the *Church Times* failed to supply the obvious parallel. It is simply the fact that the same phenomenon takes place here. Converts to Christianity are recruited mainly from the "uneducated" classes. What else—knowing the truth about Christianity—could be expected?

"Observer" of the *Sunday Observer* is, we fear, an incurably irreligious jester. Referring to the protest of American publishers at the dumping of European Bibles on the United States, he says: "That will interfere with the plans for a special missionary effort to convert the gangster of Chicago." But this little joke depends upon the assumption that the Chicago gangsters need to be converted to Christianity, and there is no evidence to show that this assumption is justified. We would not be at all surprised to learn that the American gangsters had issued another protest objecting to the insinuation that they do not regularly read their own Bibles.

In an "open letter" to Sir John Reith of the B.B.C., Mr. Hannen Swaffer says:—

You should not restrict your religious services, Presbyterian though you are, to the highly respectable conventional sects, but give the others a chance.

And instead of silly debates that take place between mediocrities on nothing, you should allow people of advanced thought to say something important, for a change.

Mr. Swaffer's anxiety concerning freedom for all opinions where broadcasting is concerned is rather belated. We have been asking for that freedom ever since British broadcasting began. However, we should rather like to know how much freedom of opinion Mr. Swaffer believes in. Does he agree that Freethought philosophy and criticism should be permitted expression through the medium of broadcasting as often as the expression of religious opinion? If not, why not?

The Bishop of Chelmsford has been telling the readers of *John Bull* that, "It's hard to be good." In the course of his article, which reaches the usual mental level of the average parish magazine, he explains what isn't goodness:—

There is a certain type of goodness—or shall we call it goody-goodyness?—which is too often confused with goodness. This is really religious priggishness. Prigs are always objectionable, but the religious prig is the worst of all.

At this juncture, we cannot help wondering what there can be in religion which enables it to produce the most objectionable of any type of prig. At a guess, we should say that it is the prig's certainty of having been "saved," and of being one of God's special pets.

Another of the Bishop's conclusions is that "Goodness is probably much harder to discover in Belgravia than in Canning Town. That is why Christ said: 'How hardly shall a rich man enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.' He did not say, 'How hardly shall a poor man enter into the Kingdom.'" After that, we are rather anxious to know why so large a portion of religious energy in the conversion line should be directed at the "poor" man. This is odd in view of the Bishop's implied suggestion that the "poor" man acquires some fundamental notions of goodness through the hardships and sorrows he experiences. We should have thought that the "saving" of one wicked man was a greater achievement than "saving" a hundred "poor" men, and that therefore the Bishop's article—sermon would have been more valuable if it were printed in the expensive magazines read by the rich. Of course, the reason why so much more attention is given to the working-classes is that parsons believe that these classes are more ignorant and more credulous than the people of other classes. We hope the working-classes appreciate the implied compliment.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of the Slovaks has had a severe attack of spiritual dyspepsia. A Society of Unbelievers has been formed at Koshitsa, the See of the said Bishop, and in a sermon preached in the Cathedral he blamed the faithful for the event and enjoined a fast of one week upon them, during which period even water was forbidden. We hope shortly to hear of a large influx of new members to the Society of Unbelievers—many of whom will doubtless toast their new allegiance with a jug of water.

It is quite understandable that our parsons should feel rather aggrieved nowadays at their being neglected. For did they not splendidly help the nation in the war, keeping alive the Lord God of Battles to provide a victory? But to-day these glorious Christian services to the nation are being forgotten. Thus, the Bishop of Ripon exclaims: "To-day it is the Kingdom of God or chaos." The implication of this is, of course, that if "chaos" is to be avoided, the "Kingdom of God" must be sought after; and for that the parson is indispensable. Furthermore, if the parson is ignored, then there will be trouble for the nation. One cannot help admiring the neat way in which the worthy bishop packs all this into a short sentence. It will, however, scare only the more primitive minds of the community.

The Rev. A. E. Whitham has been writing about modern Youth and Religion. He mentions that youth is living in a freer world, that many taboos are lifted and many conventions have passed. He talks about the passing of false guides, the silencing of false voices, the going of unworthy motive, the break-up of the mere respectabilities. There is a great slump in the stock of Tradition. Youth, he says, is prepared to tweak the nose of the most venerable beliefs and institutions, turn them round and inside out, and then, as though passing judgment on a new device for opening sardine tins, to drop it with the words, "it won't do." Home, marriage, woman—as traditions—are under review. Youth looks round, and everything seems in the melting-pot. And youth asks "Why not religion?" Mr. Whitham adds:—

The ecclesiastical divisions and the theological confusions make the question more pointed. Roman Catholics on birth control are obdurate. Dean Inge on that subject, as upon many others, takes up a contradictory position. The Archbishop of Canterbury and most of the bishops are at variance with many Nonconformist on the subject of marriage and divorce. Bishop Barnes and the High Anglicans are notoriously at war on the subject of the Sacraments, and the Fundamentalists and Modernists are fighting about every other religious and theological question. A thoughtful young man may well turn round and say, "You don't know where you are. How dare you come to me urging your costly claims upon my life?"

By the look of things, we should say that the *thoughtful* young men and women are not likely to be captured by the Churches. The parsons' only hope is to try to drag in the unthinking. And as for re-union among the Churches, Mr. Whitham's account of religious opinion to-day would suggest that re-union is no nearer reality than it has ever been. It is not religion that will unite the Churches but expediency.

Writing about Bible-teaching in the day school, the Rev. A. T. G. Scaton says that "Sometimes Sunday-school teachers gather from their scholars that the teaching they receive on week-days is pitifully small, inaccurate, given in a take-it-or-leave-it spirit, and occasionally with the suggestion that it is all an outworn superstition." Far more often, says Mr. Scaton, the reverse is the case, and the position is improving; the prospect of good Bible-teaching in day schools was never so hopeful. Mr. Scaton contrasts it with former times when Passive Resisters were having their goods removed, and even going to prison, rather than pay a rate for the provision of teaching with which they did not agree, Mr. Scaton adds:—

At that time many people thought that peace and progress in the realm of Education were only to be bought at the price of clearing religious teaching out of the day school altogether. Had that solution of our difficulties been adopted, we should now have been in the

same position as some English-speaking countries do occupy to-day, and the task of Sunday schools would have been far heavier than it is.

Mr. Seaton doesn't explain why the day schools, with public funds contributed by non-Christians and by very many more citizens who are indifferent to religion, should be used for doing the work of Sunday schools—that is, making clients for the parsons. So far as we can see, the only principle that can be cited is that of Christian impudence.

Writing about the war in the East, a daily paper argues that Britain should "keep out of it," the reason for this advice being given is that "We cannot afford wars." After digesting that, we have a suspicion that if the nation *could* afford a war, and if there was something substantial to be gained by it, our wise newspaper tutors wouldn't hesitate to advise the nation to "butt in," and go to the assistance of one of the combatant Eastern nations. Our suspicion is not an unworthy one, in view of the fact that the intellectual level of many of our "moulders of public opinion" is no higher than the notion that Peace is desirable, only if nothing can be gained by War.

A pious journal announces that the Rev. James Barr, a former Labour M.P., is to give a series of public addresses on Christian apologetics, some of his subjects being "Has Jesus stood the test?" "Does death end all?" "The abiding fitness of the Gospel." Furthermore, our contemporary tells us that "Unlike some of his former Parliamentary colleagues, Mr. Barr has found no difficulty in finding employment in preaching and lecturing after losing his seat in the House." There appears to be a moral here for unemployed M.P.'s. It seems to run thus. When you can no longer be engaged in attending to the practical concerns of the nation, a useful acquirement is the ability to spout glib information about an assumed "other world" and its concerns. This is a job with money in it; for there are always fools willing to be parted from their money, in exchange for nothing—provided you call it "divine knowledge."

The Bishop of London has expressed his regret that the young people of to-day increasingly regard the old Christian morality as old-fashioned. This is, of course, scarcely a matter for surprise, since old things generally do become old-fashioned to young people.

What we would like to know is, whether the Bishop has similar regrets concerning the views of older persons in regard to the *new* Christian morality. Admittedly there does not appear to be much surface difference between the two moralities. The main change seems to be in the opportunities for putting them into practice. For whereas the old Christian morality justified the application of all sorts of Christian cruelties to heretics, the new Christian morality merely justifies the application of all sorts of heretical views to Christian dogma and behaviour.

When the Holy Spirit comes and perches on a man's grey matter the result of the visitation is invariably amazing. The latest instance is the Rev. Thomas Tip-lady's Lambeth Anniversary Hymn, "The Song of the Redeemed," as per sample:—

All ye who know that on the cross
Christ did salvation bring,
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice
And make the welkin ring.

O make the welkin ring with joy,
And silence all around;
Till every man shall hear the song
That we, in Christ, have found.

One gathers that the effect of spiritual exaltation is substantially little different from spiritous exaltation. In both instances there is a craving to lift up the voices and make the welkin ring and silence all around—and become a nuisance to more sober folk. One notices, too, that the "redeemed" are invariably moved to lift up their voices, but never to lift up their intellects. That, it may be presumed, is because they have merely been redeemed from "sin" and not from credulousness and stupidity, and other defects of the Christian mind.

The job of gingering-up enthusiasm for schemes to convert the country to Christianity appears none too easy. Thus the Rev. Ensor Walters, speaking in regard to Methodism generally, is moved to exclaim:—

Are we true to that great note of the Church by which we ought to exist? If we have done with evangelism, done with belief in miraculous conversion, fearful of belief in the power and unction of the Holy Spirit, if we have made no desperate effort to declare the evangel of God to the masses outside all the Churches, if we have flung up the sponge as regards the outsider, then what hope is there?

The poor man seems rather doleful. But why worry? The *Methodist Recorder* is inclined to fancy that revival may begin through the "many religious men and women outside the organized churches." For we gather that there are no signs of increased attendance at churches, nor of a modification of the alienation of the masses, nor of a deepened spiritual life and quickened zeal within the Church itself. So the best thing Mr. Walters can do is to "wait and see," and leave it to God. Quite likely God is staging a quite new departure in the way of religion and religious revival—one in which there will be no parsons required at all.

Bishop Taylor Smith wins the Putty Medal and Both Bun for the best story of the week. He states that he encountered two cyclists who were searching in the road for a steel pin lost from one of their machines. So he merely said: "Lord, if it be thy will, let me find the pin quickly." And sure enough the Lord let him find it immediately. Then the party doffed their hats (just like a Salvation Army group) and gave thanks to the Almighty for having so signally demonstrated his omniscience through the mediumship of his faithful servant Taylor Smith. That is the Bishop's story. But the second prize, we think, should be awarded to another version of the same yarn, narrated by a little worm who chanced to be crawling by just at the critical moment. This little liar positively asserted that the Bishop, having first spotted the pin, carelessly covered it with his foot and then addressed the All-seeing Divinity.

It has come at last. Following various "Omnibus" volumes on all sorts of subjects, the world is presented with one on *Catholic Sermons*. More than forty "scholars and parish priests" have come together and brought out "for the first time," a marvellous work in which "the reader will see the problem of presenting the faith to the modern world as conceived by representative preachers." Well, it's one thing to assert the problem and quite another thing to bring the modern world back to "the faith."

We would suggest that an omnibus volume of omnibus volumes on the subject will never do that. The world has passed the stage of the primitive simplicity so necessary for such a task.

Fifty Years Ago.

A DEADLY SIN.

"COME listen all good Christian folk
To a pastoral from a bishop,
It's far too serious for a joke
The food that you may dish up:
This thing is lawful — that is not—
Therefore you'd best eschew it,
When other food is to be got
Just mind you don't eat suet.

"On every day you may have meat
Except Wednesday and Fridays,
But still be cautious what you eat
On holidays and high days,
Dripping and lard may grease your chins,
But surely you will rue it,
If you go adding to your sins
The crime of eating suet."

The "Freethinker," March 5, 1882.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—Miss V. Murray, 5s.; A. T. Gibbons, 5s.

C. THOMPSON.—The Secular Society, Limited will shortly be issuing a book dealing with the revenues of the Church.

J. BARTRAM, A.F.L., S. B. SAVILL.—Next week.

IGNORUS.—Thanks. We are always ready to supply the *Freethinker* to public libraries, but it is usually necessary for those on the spot to apply for it being taken. We would willingly send.

H. MURPHY.—Many thanks for cuttings. They will be very useful.

T. MARTIN.—As the Americans say, "You have us wrong." We would put it this way. The average politician is only about fifty years behind his time. The average military leader is about a hundred years behind his time. The average parson is really advanced if he is only a century and a half behind the time.

G. H. CANTLER.—The King may have been correct when he said that no village was complete without a village idiot, but there does not seem any shortage in idiots in either town or country.

H.B.C.—Verses are clever, but rather too one-sided for successful satire.

G. R. SMITH.—The cry of "Leave religion alone" is as you suggest, mainly raised by those who are afraid of it, and so help it by their tacit acquiescence to its claims. The road to a solution of most of our problems, social and other, is clear thinking. We are pleased to have your appreciation of the *Freethinker*.

The "*Freethinker*" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.

The Secular Society, Limited Office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Letters for the Editor of the "*Freethinker*" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/0.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

Sugar Plums.

On Sunday next (March 13) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Beecheroff Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead. In the afternoon, at 3, the subject will be "Do the Dead Live?" In the evening, at 7, "The Benefits of Unbelief." Admission will be free, but there will be a limited number of reserved seats at 1s. each.

The Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will take place this year on Whit-Sunday, May 15, at Manchester. Secretaries of Branches, and members are reminded that all motions for the Conference Agenda must reach the General Secretary not later than April 2.

East London Freethinkers and friends wishing to spend a happy evening should attend the West Ham Branch's Social in the Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London E., on Saturday, March 12. A programme of dances, games, songs, etc., has been arranged, and all will receive a hearty welcome. Admission is free, and proceedings will commence at 7 o'clock prompt.

At the invitation of the Metropolitan Secular Society, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will speak in the City of London Hotel, 107 York Road, Camden Town, London, N.7., at 7.20 p.m. to-day (Sunday) on "The God Men of Science Believe in."

Mr. Saphin will to-day (March 6) lecture at three and seven o'clock in the Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus. Mr. Saphin has visited Plymouth before, and we hope to hear that he has had good meetings.

The Secular Society, Limited will issue shortly a work by Mr. Alan Handsacre dealing with the revenues of religion. The work will deal with the question of tithes, the sources of the Church's revenues, and the general evils and injustices of an Established Church. It is largely historical and so should be useful to all. The book will be published at 1s. in paper and 2s. 6d. cloth.

Reason, the organ of the Rationalistic Association of India, reprints as a special supplement our "Views and Opinions" for December 27, dealing with "War and the Churches." We note that the January number did not appear owing to there not being time to make a statutory declaration before a magistrate. We do not know the nature of the declaration required, but these kind of things make us realize that the war was really fought on behalf of the liberties of peoples.

We hope that those who wish some alteration of the B.B.C. Sunday programme will keep up their protests both to the B.B.C. and to the public press. The latest example of the deliberate lying—there is no use mincing matters in this case—in the interests of the Churches is contained in a recent letter to Mr. S. Clowes, in reply to a request for an alternative programme. The B.B.C. replies:—

There is no present intention of changing Sunday programmes . . . The demand for broadcasting on that day of the week is so small as to be virtually negligible . . . Our 8 p.m. religious services make as strong a religious appeal to listeners as does anything that is broadcast.

The only truthful statement in this reply is the first. The B.B.C. will continue as an organization for preaching Christianity on Sunday until the public compels it to behave otherwise. The lie is not only plain to every licence holder, but is as clumsy a lie as anyone could tell. Surely its committee of parsons could inspire a more plausible lie than this one. Everyone knows that all who can reach the Continent on Sunday do so, with comparatively few exceptions. The makers of gramophone records—the Decca, H.M.V., etc.—reserve their broadcasts for Sunday, send their representatives to Paris and other continental stations because, as they avow on Sunday they can reach the larger number of British listeners. The B.B.C. declines the test of a canvas in order to make clear what it is that people want. All it can do is to mouth the miserable falsehood that there is no demand for a change, when the larger number of newspapers are denouncing the Sunday programme as a public scandal, and refuse to put the question to the test of canvassing those who provide its revenue. Its character is truly Christian.

Fifty-seven persons were admitted as members at the last monthly meeting of the Executive, and a new Branch of the Society formed at Stockport. This was an excellent "bag," and we hope to see it repeated each month. We may take the glad tidings as occasion for reminding those to whom the information is necessary that all subscriptions from existing members were due on January 1, and that the financial year closes in March. We should like to see this year a record for subscriptions, as it has been for new members. We trust that this hint will be enough for us to hear that the year's accounts have been satisfactorily closed.

Liverpool reports a good meeting on Sunday last, on the occasion of Mrs. Venton's first lecturing visit to the Branch. Her subject was "Religion and Woman." The hall was comfortably filled, and Mrs. Venton's good humour and pointed replies to questions and opposition gave much satisfaction to those present. Hopes were expressed for a return visit.

The *Daily Telegraph* is among the best of the London dailies, and, of course, very much superior in its general outlook to papers such as the *Express*, the *Mail*, the *Herald* and the *News-Chronicle*. But where religion is concerned there is not much to choose between any of them. There the instrument of repression is in full play. Thus, Dr. W. W. Hardwicke sends us a copy of a letter which was refused insertion by the *Telegraph*. The letter was a very courteous protest against legislation in Parliament in favour of enforced sabbatarianism, *apropos* of a Bill at present before the House of Commons. Had it been a letter from some obscure and ignorant bigot dwelling upon the possibility of "God's anger" the letter would have been inserted. We would not, of course, accuse the Editor of the *Telegraph* of being himself a bigot, any more than we would bring the accusation against any of the other Editors of the London papers. It is a question of circulation, and there are far more of Carlyle's "mostlies" in the population than of any other class.

Criticism and the Bible.

IV.—THE FLOOD.

THE Biblical legend of the flood, like that of creation, is also clearly recognisable as a medley of different mythical traditions. For some time past, Biblical criticism has succeeded in distinguishing at least two accounts of the flood, an Elohistic¹ and a Yahwistic,² *i.e.*, one account in which God is spoken of as Elohim and in the other as Yahwe. Again, in the Elohistic report we read that "two of every sort," a male and a female, were taken into the ark, while in the Yahwistic text "clean beasts" are distinguished from those "that are not clean," and of the clean beasts as well as of the birds, as many as "seven"³ of each sort were admitted into the ark. Further, in the Elohistic account, the flood originates from another cause than that alleged in the Yahwistic narrative. In the first case, "were all the fountains of the great deep broken up and the windows of heaven were opened," and the rising of the flood endured for one hundred and fifty days. On the other hand, the Yahwistic legend knows only of rain as the cause; and "the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." Finally, in the first account the abatement of the flood takes, according to the customary reckoning, five and a half months, while in the second account it takes only twenty-one days.

As a rule, the Biblical critics rest contented after they have reduced this legend of the flood to two reports. It is, nevertheless, easy to demonstrate that neither of those accounts are themselves unitary. Each of them contains quite different ingredients. The only doubt is whether this mixture is due to the amalgamation of certain fixed writings, or whether it took place—which is most likely—before the time of writing, when the legends about the flood still circulated in the form of oral traditions.

Let us take one example only of this intermixture of different ingredients—an example from the Elohistic report.

In this report, it says that the deluge began in the six hundredth year of Noah's age and on the seventeenth day of the second month of the same.⁴ The flood rose for one hundred and fifty days and then began to abate, so that on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, that is, after the beginning of the

flood, the ark came to rest on Ararat.⁵ Still, it was not until the first day of the six hundred and first year of Noah's life that the waters dried up and "the face of the ground was dry."⁶

The rise of the flood lasted accordingly five months or one hundred and fifty days. The month is reckoned at thirty days. That corresponds to the solar-year reckoning as we find it, for example, among the old Canaanites and Egyptians, since those peoples reckoned the solar year as consisting of twelve months of thirty days, and then at the close added five supplementary days—in all three hundred and sixty-five days. But the Hebrews reckoned according to the lunar year of three hundred and fifty-four days (six months of thirty days and six months of twenty-nine days) and, later, in order to equalize their lunar reckoning with the solar reckoning, they inserted at definite periods of time a leap-month. For this purpose of equalization, eleven days were added, thus making three hundred and sixty-five in all.

The calculation, therefore, of five months of one hundred and fifty days is not of Hebrew origin. But, further, another five and a half months ensue until finally on the first day of the six hundred and first year of Noah's life, the new period in the earth's history begins. The duration of the flood was accordingly ten and a half months.

In addition to this reckoning, there is still another inserted in the Elohistic text. According to this, it was only on the first day of the tenth month that the "tops of the mountain" were visible;⁷ and only on the twenty-seventh day of the second month of the six hundred and first year of Noah's life, that the earth was dried.⁸ The flood, therefore, endured for twelve months (according to Hebrew reckoning 354 days) and eleven days—in all three hundred and sixty-five days, or exactly a solar year.

It is expressive of the character of the theological exegesis of the Bible, that however deep the etymological analysis, it does not recognize this and other intermixtures of disparate legends or parts of legends. That is a consequence of the theological view that the two or three singled-out reports of the older parts of Genesis, represent separate and self-contained trains of thought instead of each being, as it actually is, a number of different sorts of locally-coloured popular traditions. It has struck one or two exegetists that there is a contradiction between Ch. viii, v. 13, and Ch. viii, v. 14, but they are unable to see the basis of this contradiction. They have nothing to offer as an explanation other than the assertion that the contradiction is due to a lack of accuracy in two different systems of reckoning. But, in reality, three systems of reckoning are clearly indicated in the texts.

There are still more important questions which have to be considered in the course of a scientific critique of the religious history of the Hebrews, such as, for example: how far there is reflected in the legends of the Old Testament quite definite ideas of God and his relation to man; to what stage in the evolution of religion they belong, and how far they have a universal character for the history of religion or are only particular phenomena belonging to a certain people and territory. But, unfortunately, such questions do not exist for the theologically disposed critics of the Bible. They believe that the main work is done when they have dissected the texts, a work which is only a kind of re-arranging or sorting labour.

¹ Genesis vi. 13-22; vii. 6-9, 11, 13, 15½, 18-21, 24; viii. 2½, 3½-5, 13-19; ix. 1-17.

² The intermediate parts of Ch. vi, from v. 5, up to the conclusion of Ch. viii.

³ The sacred Hebrew number.

⁴ Genesis, vii. 11.

⁵ Genesis viii. 4.

⁶ Genesis viii. 13.

⁷ Genesis viii. 5.

⁸ Genesis viii. 14.

Quite a number of them remain content with a comparison between the Biblical reports of the deluge and the Chaldean verse discovered, in 1872, by the well-known Assyriologist, George Smith (the cuneiform account belongs to the seventeenth century B.C., but the text is much older), and with showing how closely the Biblical account of the flood is connected with the Babylonian myth.* Some of them raise the question of the origin and significance of the Chaldean story of the flood.

But even by the more "rationalist" critics, the idea that the myth has a historical background, that it is an enlarged and exaggerated account of an event that had occurred in far off times, that there is the recollection of an actual flood underlying the legend, is rejected, often without any investigation, since such an investigation offends their idealistic mode of thought and contradicts their *a priori* dogma that myths must be explained out of the consciousness of the "naive children of Nature." Instead of studying this consciousness as we find it represented in the flood myths of different primitive peoples (there are hundreds of such myths), and seeking to find out what underlies those conceptions, they try to put themselves in the place of the naive man of Nature, by attempting to eliminate from their minds the results of their modern university education—they do not succeed, of course—and then questioning how their naive consciousness would be able to acquire a conception of an immense flood. And the more phenomenal their powers of imagination are, the more amazing is the hotch potch which they present for intellectual consumption.

As an example of the kind of thing which is dished up by superficial speculation, take the following summarized argument:

Man, in early times, contemplated the mystery of life, of death and resurrection, in conjunction with the course and fate of the moon. Every four weeks, the moon is swallowed up by the sun. It happens with the moon every month, as it happens with all Nature in the winter. But, ever and anon, the moon tears itself loose from the evil enemy and begins anew its old course. It is the hero who arises anew out of every extinction with re-juvenated beauty. And precisely in the moment when it appears, it presents a sickle-shaped aspect. It was not surprising that under such circumstances it should impress the naive uncultured man as a ship which sailed over the heavenly ocean, and that carried as its cargo the seeds of new life.

The naiveté of early man did not assume this form of modern muddleheadedness. In the first place, the sickle-shaped moon is said to have awakened the idea of a ship. Wonderful! But, as is well known, the sickle moon is usually seen, not lying on its back but standing erect! Secondly, there is in the Babylonian and Biblical flood legends no mention whatever about a ship, but about a large ark. For such an accomplished imagination, however, it is perhaps just as easy to fancy that the moon is a large ark! There is still lacking a sea on which the ark might float.

* Since 1872, other discoveries of older Babylonian accounts of the flood, have been made. For example, among the oldest fragments collected by the American Professor H. B. Hilprecht, there is "the oldest version of the Babylonian Deluge Story and the Temple Library of Nappur," which he gives in his book, under this title (1910). He estimates the inscription as dating back, approximately, to the year 2200 B.C. He is, also, of the opinion that the report descends from the Sumerian and is nothing but a translation into the Semitic-Babylonian. It is worthy of note, too, that also this oldest flood story traces the flood back, not to the continuous rain but, like the flood legends of almost all island and coast peoples, to the rising of the water out of the sea.

But that, too, is a mere trifle for modern naivete. The sea is very soon supplied. The air is simply thought of as water, the airy firmament as an ocean. And since this naive child of Nature has now got properly into his imaginative stride, he has no difficulty in thinking the other ingredients of the legend!

Thus the problem is solved! But it is rather unfortunate that in most of the hundreds of flood myths, no boat, ship or ark is to be found! Those who escape drowning are saved—where there is any mention made of survivors—by reaching high mountains, or cliffs, and by finding a secure refuge in rocky caves or holes; or they have been caught up and borne to a place of safety by a god, who is often thought of as an eagle, vulture, raven, etc.

In the second place, there is lacking in four-fifths of the legends of floods, the conception of a heavenly ocean, of a great billowy water-waste above. The flood does not take place on account of rain, but through the rise of masses of water out of large rivers or seas; and in many cases this inundation is traced back to the outbreak of a great cyclone or to an earthquake. Especially in the flood stories of the peoples on the west coast of America, the inundation is described as a consequence of volcanic phenomena.

Many of these flood legends are nothing but exaggerated recollections of earlier inundations. But not in all cases. It is often easy to recognize that several creation myths have clashed together and have conjoined in such a way, that one is regarded as the first creation of the world, and the other as a later, new creation. The old earth has sunk beneath the flooded waters frequently as the result of a struggle between rival gods, between one god of creation and another and later god. Not infrequently in these legends it happens that all men perish as well, and the new god creates an entirely new earth. It is not difficult to understand how it comes about, as has been observed in Central America and in the middle regions of the Cordilleras, in South America, that in adjoining territories those creation-legends present themselves in different stratified orders. What is for one people the first creation, is for another a later creation which took place only after the flood; and conversely. There are also many tribes that know not only of one but of two, three and even four destructions and re-creations of the world.

But this is a quite different interpretation of folklore from that of the *uncritical* Bible critics. To reach it, we have to abandon the theological, subjective and idealistic standpoint, for the ethnological, historical and materialistic standpoint.

W. CRAIK.

More Light on Prophecy.

A YEAR or two back, I took some pains to examine a Christadelphian pamphlet entitled *The Bible and Modern Scepticism*. It was by Mr. Islip Collyer and purported to be a calm and reasoned reply to the "sceptic" who disbelieved the Bible and in particular the "prophecies." Now if one wanted to answer every type of Christian who urged "testimony the unbeliever never faces" (one of Mr. Collyer's pet phrases), we should require space enough to fill the *Freethinker* for many months to come—or we could dismiss the lot with a sniff of contempt. (Incidentally, that is all most of this kind of halderdash ought to get). Unfortunately, new readers to this journal come along and find that some of the weird claims of believers never or rarely get referred to here and imagine it is because we either have overlooked them or did not know them or never answered them or even could not if we tried.

In my own case, so anxious have I been to get at "both sides," that I have wasted years of valuable time tracking down the nonsense put forward by dozens of Christian sects as the only "Gospel" truth, and I have in almost every case wondered whether mental aberration could go further. Give me a straightforward genuine Christian, Anglican, Roman, or even Nonconformist and I know where I am. They take the usual meaning given to English words in the Authorized Version of the Bible literally, they are ready to believe that black is white, because "the Bible or the Church tells me so," they have unbounded faith in God's Holy Word or Our Blessed Saviour, and I reply—for God's sake, leave 'em alone. Most of them are quite unable to think rationally, and until they do, it is nearly impossible to approach them. Silly as they are, however, they are miles better off than believing members of some extraordinary sects which Christianity has given birth to. Very rarely can one detach a matured adult from the parent body and really, do we want most of them with us? After all, a man must think for himself, must read for himself and above all, ponder on what he has read. A great deal of our literature is not food for babes. It is written by men who have themselves gone the difficult road of unbelief and who often feel, after years of study, how little they know. The believer who finds all the world's knowledge and wisdom in the Bible, who can answer every query by "God did it," and who is satisfied with this kind of thing, is really better with his believing friends.

A lady recently sent a copy of Mr. Collyer's pamphlet to us and wants a reply. But why? If this journal is carefully read, and such a fine compendium of "infidelity" as Foote's *Bible Handbook* is carefully studied, nearly everything urged by Mr. Collyer will be found answered by anticipation.

The dispersion of the Jews "foretold" in Deuteronomy, and the prophecy of Jesus "foretold" by Isaiah are the rocks upon which Mr. Collyer builds and of course they are impregnable. Daniel's marvellous reckoning of the time of "Messiah, the Prince" is also put forward as is "the hand of God in our own days"—which means the Jews are back in their own pet Holy Land and so on. Mr. Collyer takes ninety-eight pages in detailing all this and more, and punctuates his exposition with such gems of sparkling wisdom as these:—

Our reason yields to the evidence that the Bible is inspired of God. The sceptic as a rule will not properly listen while we unfold the evidence of reason . . . It is not in the least degree more difficult to believe in an intelligent living First Cause than a blind unconscious force . . . Even the late Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, while calling himself an Atheist, did not deny the existence of God . . . I do not suppose, however, that one intelligent sceptic in a thousand would suggest that the early Christians were liars . . . Open your Bible at the 53rd of Isaiah. Remember that this is a part of Jewish Scripture . . . Remember that the Jews reject and hate Jesus and that their fathers pierced him . . . When an unbeliever attempts a reply to the prophetic argument, he almost invariably makes a tacit admission of its force by the nature of his attack. . . .

But really is it worth while to quote more? This kind of empty balderdash impresses some people—either the wholehearted believer or the "intelligent" sceptic, but may heaven save me from such a fate!

Personally I read books like Islip Collyer's in a maze of wonderment. Can he really believe that the Bible in its pristine purity as we have it in the Authorized Version, came straight from God, contradictions, prophecies, atrocities, immoralities and all? Did God really write most of it, in the first place, in

good Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek exactly as in our manuscript versions? Did he really foresee or foretell the dispersion of the Jews exactly as described in Deuteronomy and reproduced (in part) by Mr. Collyer? Did he really inspire Isaiah and the other prophets, hundreds of years before his birth, to write about Jesus as the veritable son of God and our Lord and Saviour?

On page 28 of his pamphlet, Mr. Collyer gives us some of the "prophecies" from Deuteronomy, Chapter 28. We have had these "prophecies" hurled at us *ad lib* from gallant Christians ever since "infidelity reared its ugly head." But Mr. Collyer and the other Christians always miss out the *real* gems. Why don't they begin at the beginning? If I were a betting man, I would wager any odds that the "intelligent" sceptics who are impressed by Mr. Collyer never take up the Bible themselves and read exactly what *was written*. They take his word that he is correctly quoting. It's a fatal mistake for Chapter 28 is one huge curse—if the Jews don't keep God's commandments. And a most amusing curse it is. God never minces matters but, really, talk about "getting it in the neck"! What does Holy Writ say:—

The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee . . . Thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass . . . The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt and with the emerods and the scab and with the itch whereof thou canst not be healed . . . The madness and blindness . . . Thou shalt betroth a wife and another man shall lie with her . . . Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes and thou shalt not eat thereof . . . The Lord shall bring thee and thy King which thou shalt set over thee unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and thou shalt serve other gods, wood and stone . . .

And so on. How beautiful is this holy language, is it not? But would you believe it, Mr. Collyer does not quote these things. He commences a little later on and, for the life of me, I can't see why one prophecy isn't as good as another; except, of course, my selection has *not* been fulfilled. The Jews don't have the itch or the botch any more than anybody else, and they don't "serve" other gods, whether wood or stone. Mr. Collyer's brothers and sisters in Christ do though, and I'll take him any time he likes and show him where.

The fact is the "prophecies" in Deuteronomy and other places in the Old Testament about the Jews are things written *after* the first break-up of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and are the kind of writings Ezra and his fellow priests found it necessary to frighten their followers with, in order to keep them to the faith. The Old Testament in the form we have it, is a late redaction of old legends and myths, and the idea that it contains the Hand of God is a hopelessly antiquated fallacy. Even pious Jews are forced to admit Ezra wrote it, and their assumption that Ezra simply put down from memory (or was guided by God himself) every letter and word contained in a previous Bible is simply assumption and nothing else. As for the prophecies of "Christ" in the Old Testament, Jews have consistently denied every one of them and any impartial reader must agree with them. The plain and sufficient answer is the following: when the early drafts or collection of the supposed sayings of Jesus were put together, subsequent editors felt it necessary to add details of the "life" of Jesus. As there were no materials whatever for such a life, they took details of Messiahs from the Jewish prophets and worked them up in the gospels. As, however, the gospels were constantly worked upon even these details got a bit mixed as anyone can find out for himself if only he will study the prophecies and the gospels together and not take

Mr. Collyer's word. What is the good of quoting Isaiah to the effect that "he hath no former comeliness" when Luke says "the grace of God was upon him," or that "there is no beauty that we should desire him," when Luke says he "increased in wisdom and stature," or that "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth," when John says he answered Pilate and the Chief priests at some little length? One could go on and examine these and similar "prophecies," but "time is fleeting and life is short." Why waste more space on the imbecilities of Mr. Collyer and his like?

H. CUTNER.

Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

THE THING IN ITSELF.

SIR,—I have been greatly perturbed by visions of a harassed Editor being distracted from important productive work by the metaphysical meanderings of a contributor with a bee in his bonnet. It is entirely Mr. Cohen's fault, however. If he had not written *Materialism Re-stated* I should not have been induced to follow-up the problems he so lucidly sketched therein.

First, on a question of fact. Nowhere in my article did I say Berkeley denied MIND as "thing-in-itself." This, for me, is beside the point; which is as follows: does "substance," as I defined it, exist? *i.e.*, does the conception of "qualities" give us all we need, or can we usefully employ also the conception of "substance"? In affirming that we can, I am affirming that sensational effects are effects of external formations in substance; *i.e.*, they relate to qualities; and furthermore, these qualities qualify substance.

Nowhere in my article did I say (or I hope, infer) that there was a table over and above the aggregate of its qualities. What I assert is, that that localized group of qualities "out there" exists independent of being perceived. Mr. Cohen says (pp. 17, 18), if we take away the perceived qualities there is nothing left. Noting that he championed the Berkeleyan position (to the point we are considering), I take it that he means qualities as perceived. Here I differ, and assert that qualities can exist when not perceived. We infer that heat existed when sense-organs did not; and thus heat existed by virtue of its effects, not on nervous systems, but on "surrounding fields." Qualities are not annihilated in the absence of their appearances to us. They are external; they precede and endure being known; whereas Berkeley's depend on being perceived at the present time.

Either Mr. Cohen agrees with this or he doesn't. If he doesn't (*i.e.*, if he remains Berkeleyan) then how can he avoid Berkeley's God who accommodates events in his perception when our backs are turned? If, however, he does agree that qualities are external and not mind-ejected (*i.e.*, if he does recant the Berkeleyan position) then he may still wish to assert that, given qualities, there is no need for substance; and from this I dissent. I am using three postulates; *viz.* (a) phenomena (localized groups of qualities), (b) their sensational effects when confronted with nervous systems, and (c) their common bedding, substance.

Qualities come and go, but substance persists. For example, we can "take away" the qualities of a tree (size, shape, etc.) by chopping it up or burning it, and can obtain the qualities of tables, chairs, and smoke. We have exchanged old qualities for new. But we have observed a calculable, causal sequence in the process. The stuff which constituted "tree" now constitutes "table," "smoke," etc. What has persisted? Tree-qualities haven't, and thus I claim a use for the conception of substance, which I defined as self-existent.

Substance takes forms, each form behaving in a particular manner (*i.e.*, each form being a special group of qualities). Change of form results in change of behaviour (*i.e.*, arrival of new qualities). These forms are forms of substance: substance is qualified by

qualities. In a word, quality-groups are temporary, and dependent on formations; whereas substance is self-existent datum. And we are back with the old Greeks.

This is the only substance I want. Never in any article have I championed a substance "absolutely distinct from anything in our consciousness," a position which Mr. Cohen again demolishes in his rejoinder. On the contrary, I said (p. 122), "All the time we are dealing with what enters into consciousness, and what we infer to exist independent of consciousness." If this should transpire to be a dispute over terms, it goes to prove the importance of a fixed terminology.

G. H. TAYLOR.

[I have space for but a few words of comment on the above. (1) If Mr. Taylor does not champion a "substance" absolutely distinct from anything in our consciousness, then I confess I do not understand him, since it is certain that all we know in consciousness is not distinct from consciousness. (2) I do not know how known qualities can exist apart from our consciousness. Heat is an unfortunate illustration since that clearly does not exist in the absence of a sentient organism. (3) Mr. Taylor's words were "according to Berkeley . . . there is nothing in itself" apart from the qualities we perceive. Berkeley's position is that the qualities exist because of a thing in itself, which is mind=God. (4) It is the conception of a synthesis of qualities that give us all we need, and which properly understood supplies us with categories of "objective" and "subjective," and dispenses with the inconceivable "substance" which is a legacy from a pre-scientific metaphysic, and absolutely useless from any point of view. For the rest I can only suggest to Mr. Taylor a re-reading of pp. 47-56 of my *Materialism Re-stated*, where he will find my position set forth as clearly as I can state it.—C.C.]

ROBERT TAYLOR AND HIS CRITICS.

SIR,—I must again trespass on your space in dealing with the letter of Mr. Howell Smith in your last issue. Let me at once assure him that I am always conscious of my limitations, but as my object when writing was to rescue the name of Robert Taylor from a little of the depreciation to which he has been subjected, I fancy that when it comes to a question of a knowledge of the history of Freethought, "limitations" appears to be a very charitable term to apply to Mr. Howell Smith's learning in that direction. In a very few years Taylor, who ought to have impressed Mr. Smith because of his many academic qualifications, wrote three masterpieces of controversy, *The Diegesis*, *Syntagma*, and the *Devil's Pulpit*, dealing respectively with the Christian origins, general Biblical controversy, and the astronomical theory of Christian origins. And one of these books was written during the three years he spent in prison for blasphemy. Mr. Smith is under no obligation to study these three books, or to understand them, but it is a help when one writes about their author—even in inferred criticism.

Mr. Howell Smith's parade of his academical qualifications does not move me, for I have noted that academic qualifications do not always run with intelligent appreciation of a subject. Mr. Smith supplies an unconscious illustration of this when he says that as he passed an examination in Latin he ought to know how Latin is pronounced. Probably, only the point at issue was how Latin was pronounced 2,000 years ago, and that is a point on which modern scholars are at variance. And I certainly did not say, nor did I think that the Latin word "Mare" was pronounced like the English word "Mary." But the assumption was necessary to inform us that Mr. Howell Smith had been taught Latin. So it served its purpose.

Mr. Smith does not recognize Miss Yonge or Madame Blavatsky which disposes of them. He also disagrees with Mr. J. M. Robertson—who agrees with me—and that removes him. I regret the elimination of Mr. Robertson, because many have thought him to be of much service to the student of Christian origins, and as for the other two I did not quote them as authorities, but merely to show that the views expressed by Taylor were shared by others, and if Mr. Smith had taken the trouble to consult the two ladies he would have seen that they do not claim to be "authorities," but do cite numerous accepted authorities in support of what they say. I refrain from citing other authorities now lest

they should also fall under Mr. Smith's displeasure, and so forfeit status. I was rash enough to send curious readers to the three writers cited who wished to follow the subject further, but that is all.

I must again insist that Astarte is Venus as any reader can find for himself, while the article in the *Biblica* actually does endorse many of the meanings given to "Marian" (Mary) by Taylor. Mr. Robertson's whole point is that Mary and the mythic Marias are "variants of a mother-goddess name generally current in the East" that is good enough for Mr. Robertson—and for me.

I am afraid Mr. Smith does not understand the point about Hebrew. He thinks that because the characters on the Moabite Stone are supposed to be allied to Hebrew, that proves that Hebrew was in early times a spoken language, as against my suggestion that it was originally nothing more than a priestly language. For his benefit I suggest that even a priestly language usually has affinities to other languages. But if Mr. Howell Smith thinks that a sacred language must be a dead language, on the lines of Latin and the Catholic Church, I would like to set him a problem nearer home. No one disputes that Bible English is English. But I should be delighted and instructed if he could tell me at what time Bible English was ever spoken or written by the English people.

I again thank Mr. Smith for reminding me of my limitations—although I was already very conscious of them. If I have said anything that will lead him to a better appreciation of Taylor and the important distinction between mere scholarship and an intelligent appreciation of fundamental questions, I shall have done something to repay my debt.

H. CUTNER.

[If either Mr. Cutner or Mr. Howell Smith desires to pursue the subject further, we must request them both to be as brief as possible, and to dispense with their opinions of each other, which however interesting to themselves is not quite so attractive to the general reader.—E.D., *Freethinker*.]

SIR,—The correspondence in the *Freethinker* and the irrelevant attitude adopted by a correspondent deploring that certain Freethinkers are "badly equipped" for their task of writing upon Christianity and make themselves "foolish in the eyes of scholarly men" exhibits a tone of superiority in excess of the statement.

It is very fortunate for the Freethought Movement, that the Freethinkers of the past (often working men) were not afraid of making themselves "foolish in the eyes of scholarly men." The scholarly men who were Freethinkers in their drawing-rooms, while those who were badly equipped for their task were "doing time" in the cause of Freethought.

Of all the species of foolishness characteristic of poor humanity I should think crude foolishness is the worst. The foolishness of a peripatetic philosopher, a medievalist of unrivalled learning, who "to-day" believes in the "witches sabbat," a modern scientist who believes in spiritualism or the educated buffoons who call themselves theologians.

Thank God! the *Freethinker* and the Secular Society have never shooed down their followers because they were not scholarly men, and it is to be hoped they never will!

ROBERT F. TURNEY.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 26, 1932.
THE President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Moss, Clifton, Silvester, Easterbrook, Preece, McLaren, Sandys, Mrs. Quinton, Junr., Mrs. Venton, Miss Kough, and the Secretary.

A number of apologies for unavoidable absence were read. Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted, monthly financial statement passed. New members were admitted as follows: Plymouth, Fulham and Chelsea, Cardiff, Birkenhead, Hants and Dorset, Sunderland, Paisley, Bradford, Liverpool, Stockport, South London, West Ham, Australia Branches, and the Parent Society. Permission was given for the formation of a new Branch

at Stockport. Reports concerning Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester Branches, and lectures at Battersea, Glasgow, Fulham, also Annual Dinner and Conference details were submitted. Arrangements for Summer Season propaganda, and preliminaries for the Charles Bradlaugh Centenary were discussed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Shorrocks Road, North End Road): 7.30, Messrs. F. Day and C. Tuson.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—A meeting will be held at White Stone Pond, Hampstead, near the Tube Station every Sunday morning at 11.30 a.m. Speaker to-day Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Mr. B. A. Le Maine; at 3.30 and 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Hyatt, Tuson and Wood. Current *Freethinkers* can be obtained opposite the Park Gates, on the corner of Edgware Road, during and after the meetings.

INDOOR.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road): 7.0, Dr. C. W. Saleeby—"Is there no place like Home?"

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, John Katz, B.A.—"The New Humanity."

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): Monday, March 7, at 8.0.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4, Hall No. 5, near Clapham North Station, Underground): 7.30, Mr. Allen Skinner (Chairman, I.L.P. Divisional Council)—"Socialism and Current Events."

THE CONWAY DISCUSSION CIRCLE (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Tuesday, March 8, at 7.0, Rev. H. D. A. Major, D.D., F.S.A. (Principal of Ripon Hall, Oxford)—"Modernism as I See it."

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (City of London Hotel, 107 York Road, Camden Road, N.7, five minutes from the Brecknock): 7.20, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—"The God Men of Science Believe in."

WEMBLEY AND DISTRICT BRANCH N.S.S. (Zealley's Cafe, 100 High Road, Wembley): 7.30, Mr. H. J. Savory—"The Churches and Elementary Education." Admission free. Questions and discussion.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Council Schools): 7.0, Mr. C. Smith—"The Modernist's View of Steller Heavens." Thursday, March 10, in the Shakespeare Rooms, 174 Edmund Street (near Livery Street), at 7.30, Mr. O. Melton—"Lanti Satano No. 1."

BIRKENHEAD (WIRRAL) BRANCH N.S.S. (Boilermakers' Hall, Argyle Street, entrance Lorn Street): 7.0, Sam Cohen (Manchester)—"An Atheist Looks at Life."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (City Hall, Albion Street, No. 2 Room): 6.30, Mr. J. Wingate—"The Metaphysics of Atheism." Questions and discussion. Silver collection.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Debate, "The Defence of Christianity." Mr. H. Green and Mr. J. T. Clayton.

HANTS AND DORSET BRANCH N.S.S. (36 Victoria Park Road, Bournemouth): 6.30, a Paper will be read followed by discussion.

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PAISLEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Baker's Hall, 5 Forbes Place) : 7.30, Hon. J. P. McLay, M.P.—"Education and the Future."
 SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Rooms, Green Street) : 7.0 p.m., Mr. T. Brown—"The Way In, and the Way Out."
 SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S.—Thursday, March 3, at Hellgarth Square Mission, at 8.0—Debate, "Evolution or Christianity." Mr. E. Bell and Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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